Our Concept of God.

March 1938.

1. From Gen. to Rev. the outstanding theme ~~is God~~, of the Bible is God. The central subject of the teachings of Jesus, as set forth in the gospels is the Kingdom of God. It therefore follows that if we are to gain recent our fullest measure of blessing from the Lenten season, from Ash Wednesday to Easter we must centralize our thinking, ~~our~~ meditating and our worship on God.

2. The Bible never questions the existance of God - it simply takes Him for granted. But this is not unique because practically all people thruout all ages have taken God for granted and have worshipped him. The uniqueness of the Bible with reference to God is to be found in its conception or understanding of God - we call it the Revelation of God to man. Nor was this revelation of God given all at once - it was a progressive revelation, changing from age to age according to the experience through which the Hebrew people were passing. The conception or understanding of God as held by Abraham & Isaac & Moses was not the same as held by the prophets, nor was the understanding of God by the prophets as complete and free from error as the interpretation of God which Jesus gave to the world.

The end, "It is a long long way to Tipperary"

2/ well, its a long long way from Israel's first conception of God as a tribal god, a super-human being with body face, fingers, foot, hand, mouth & voice to the definition of Jesus that God is Spirit. Its a long long way from the god of Israel, the people & the nation, to the God of the individual & of all humanity as set forth by Jesus. Its a long long way from the god of merely human characteristics such as mercy, grace, hatred, longsuffering, loving kindness as well as fury, jealousy, hate, vengeance & wrath to the God of righteousness & goodness & love whom we have learned to know thru Jesus Christ.

3. Bible history teaches us that the Revelation of God was always given in connection with Israels changing economic, social & political circumstances. (a) The settlement in Canaan contacted the Hebrews with more civilized peoples, new forms of worship & new customs, which acted both as a stimulus and a temptation. (b) The rise of Israel to kingship & national life, ~~which~~ brot forth the prophetic knowledge of God - more definite, more spiritual, more awfull. Amos, Hosea, Isaiah, Jeremiah (c) Contact with the great empires of Assyria, Babylon, Persia evoked tremendous changes in the national life of Israel as well as in their thinking & understanding (d) And who can measure the influence of the Exile - exile, and return for out of that midnight of the nation came the dawn for the church of Israel out of which flowered forth the Christ who makes God the Lord of Life & the Father of all mankind.

3) Not only does Bible history teach us that the Revelation of God came thru the changing circumstances of Israel's economic, political, & social life, but that the ever-growing & ever-clarifying conception of God was hindered by erroneous and heathen practices. Reversions to idolatry and human sacrifices, the taking over of such practices from other peoples such as circumcision, sacrifice, feasts, purifications, even the Sabbath (for these were already in use by the Canaanites), even tho they were gradually changed in form & use, they limited the worship the conceptions of God by the advanced thinkers. By this same process we find Jesus facing the worship of Judaism in his day, Israel's heritage of the Revelation of God, so limited & perverse, as to stand in the way of his full & true understanding of God. — hence the enmity between Jesus & the rulers of the Temple worship, hence the inevitable Cross on which he died!

4, I bring you this interpretation of Bible history with reference to our understanding of God to make plain to you that the religion of Christianity in its interpretation of God to man has also been subject to the ever changing economic, social & political circumstances of all the generations since the time of Christ, and ever subject to the perversions & reversions practiced thruout the centuries. Hence we have in our Christian ecclesiastical organizations, forms of worship, doctrinal statements and personal practices that hinder as well as express our understanding of God as given to us by Jesus Christ.

4) Take for example the claim that the only rightful approach to God is in Christ is thru ecclesiastical apostolic succession. Or the interpretation of the death of Jesus in terms of Jewish sacrificial and Roman justice. Or the expression of eternal punishment in terms of a lake of fire & brimstone. Or that God lives apart from the natural world, placing the moral and spiritual supremacy of Jesus ~~altogether~~ on a supernatural basis. And think of the bigotry, the superstition and the persecution that has been exercised in the name of Jesus Christ!

5. This leads me to say a word about atheists and agnostics. Although bitterly attacked by ecclesiastics, nevertheless the church owes to them a vote of thanks for jolting us out of our bigotry, superstition and willful ignorance of truth. Atheism is not so much a denial of God as it is a denial of certain childish misinterpretations of God by finite minds, and of certain misinterpretations of God by mistaken believers. But Atheism & Agnosticism are not the final word - their influence is but negative. We must press on toward positive reality.

5) 5. There has arisen in the modern world a method of research for truth which we call science, dealing with phenomena only. Nothing has so completely transformed economic & social life as the sciences and their resultant inventions and discoveries.

The changes in scientific ideas and viewpoints during the last quarter of a century have been amazingly in the direction of a comprehension of reality in the midst of mystery which has made to the thinking person all things new.

1. Dr. Kirtley F. Mather, prof. of Harvard wrote "Science in Search of God" and in speaking of the atom being reduced to energy, says, "An aggregation of swiftly moving units of energy seem to be the ultimate reality."

The significance of Mather's statement is this - All matter being energy and energy being the source of all life this Universe is alive. God is Life.

2. Sir James Jeans, English scientist, says that the search for reality has turned from mechanism to mathematics! That the universe looks more like a great thought than like a machine. In short, the universe is the product of Mind. God is mind - creative intelligence.

6) Sir Arthur Eddington makes the claim that if we are to understand the universal reality, the whole, we must understand the highest life-product of the universe which is man himself. Man is as real as nature is real. He is a being who thinks and who cares whether that is true and who asks why and how it is true.

The reality of man is not the body in which he lives + thru which he expresses himself. The musical beauty of the Fifth Symphony is not the several instruments that produce it. The Soliloquy of Hamlet is not the hand that wrote it or the paper on which it is printed. The lights + shadows of a painting are not the canvas nor the colored pigments upon the canvas. The spiritual reality of Jesus on the Cross is not a matter of broken bones and bleeding body. Man is Spirit. The universe is Spirit-God is Spirit. "The things which are seen are temporal, but the things which are not seen are eternal.

Life - Mind - Spirit - God.

The fullest expression of God is Man - who also is Life, Mind - Spirit.

Is God an existance in whom we live and with whom we may communicate? He is!

7. Dr. Robert Grant Aitken, director of Lick Observatory on Mt. Hamilton sums up his basic conclusions from his astronomical studies as follows:

"That the mind of man has been able to reach these great generalizations and through them to attain to the power of prediction is proof of order and rationality in the universe. It is a universe, in my belief, with thought and more than thought within it; a universe that is the expression of an immanent infinite Spirit. I find myself in complete sympathy with Walt Whitman when he writes,

Give me, O God, to sing that thought,
Give me, give him or her I love, this quenchless faith
In Thy ensemble; whatever else withheld, withhold
not from us
Belief in plan of Thee enclosed in Time and Space,
Health, peace, salvation universal.
Is it a dream?
Nay, but the lack of it a dream,
And failing, life's lore and wealth a dream,
And all the world a dream."

Thus we learn that scientific understanding of reality does not undermine our faith in God, but rather establishes it more securely. True religion has nothing to fear from scientific discoveries if they are carried thru to completion.

What was Jesus' idea of God? What unique contribution does He make to our understanding of Eternal Reality? — Wed. evening at 7.